

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: GLENN BRIERE
(617) 727-6200, EXT. 123

DeNUCCI SAYS REGISTRY NEEDS TO TAKE PROMPT ACTION AGAINST UNSAFE DRIVERS

State Auditor Joe DeNucci, in an audit of the Registry of Motor Vehicles released today, reported that delays in the processing of criminal traffic violations have allowed a large number of serious violators to remain on the road for lengthy periods after their licenses should have been suspended or revoked.

According to DeNucci's report, about 7,500 to 9,000 motorists with criminal citation dispositions reported during 2005 and 2006 were able to keep their licenses for an average two to four additional years due to administrative delays in processing the citations or, in some cases, delays by the courts in submitting the dispositions to the Registry.

Once received from the courts, adjudications of violations are forwarded by the Registry to the Merit Rating Board for entry into the Registry's computerized database. However, DeNucci's audit found that there are no procedures in place on the part of the Registry and the courts to determine whether all adjudications are received and processed by the Registry in a timely manner. DeNucci said the Registry should more closely monitor the timeliness of court dispositions to ensure that they are entered promptly in its automated system.

"The Registry is the primary agency responsible for the administration and enforcement of our motor vehicle laws, so it has a responsibility to ensure that the public is protected by suspending or revoking the licenses of unsafe drivers as soon as possible following a court disposition," said DeNucci.

In response, the Registry of Motor Vehicles, while expressing frustration with delays in getting the information from the courts, said it agreed with DeNucci's findings and will continue to work with the court system to improve the timeliness of notification of license suspensions and revocations. In addition, the new Registrar of Motor Vehicles will convene an executive working group this summer in an attempt to resolve this problem.

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In another section of DeNucci's audit, it was confirmed that the Commonwealth's communities have lost out on millions of dollars in auto excise revenues because of untimely and inaccurate tax billings to owners of luxury vehicles over the course of several years. The Registry assigned well below-market valuations for thousands of vehicles such as Ferraris, Maseratis, Bentleys, Lamborghinis, Astin Martins and some BMWs.

This problem occurred when the Registry, due to staffing shortages, stopped performing manual evaluations of luxury vehicles and established a default value of \$17,000 for any vehicle without an assigned value in the so-called "Blue Books." For example, a new Maserati with an actual value of \$325,000 would be assigned a valuation of just \$17,000, meaning that the annual excise tax bill for this car would be \$382 instead of the \$7,312 tax bill that would be calculated from a correct valuation.

Although the Registry has calculated and sent out excise tax bills totaling \$32 million for fiscal years 2005, 2006 and 2007 for these types of vehicles, DeNucci's audit determined that for fiscal year 2005 alone, 4,674 vehicles in question are longer registered in Massachusetts, which resulted in \$1.3 million in lost revenue.

In response, the Registry said it has purchased a new web-based product that will enable it to more accurately place a value on luxury vehicles that may not be included in the valuation system currently used.

DeNucci's audit also cited the Registry's failure to conduct required criminal offender record information checks for all employees to ensure the integrity of its personnel. Other deficiencies included the lack of a disaster recovery plan for the agency's computer systems and lax inventory controls over computer equipment.

"I am encouraged by the new Registrar's positive response and her commitment to address my audit findings, and I hope my report will lead to significant corrective actions," concluded DeNucci.